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ABSTRACT

Teachers of young children affect not only their ability to speak correctly but also the way they learn to think. Since children view the world in different ways depending on cultural heritage as well as individual perception, and since different experiences require differing ways of thinking and differing ways of expression, it is important for teachers to provide a rich environment to allow for a maximum amount of perception and to allow for the expression of those perceptions. Because there is a close relationship between language and cognitive development, the teacher can participate in the child's development by raising appropriate questions and by entering into dialogue with the student. The findings of psychologists, such as Vygotsky, can help teachers determine which activities will be most appropriate at different stages of development. (TJ)

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A

Positive Environment

Promotes

SPEAKING, THINKING, FEELING

It is a rare instance in today's pluralistic society to find classrooms where each child speaks with equal effectiveness and fluency. Most teachers and researchers have long recognized the diversity of children's thinking abilities, but not until recently, have they begun to note that a child's thought processes are directly and indirectly influenced by language. That a person may think without using language has been described by many psychologists and linguists. However, it is when a person speaks that some aspects of thinking processes are observable to others. The other side of this issue indicates that there too, are people who may verbalize in a non-meaningful way.

There are many children entering our classrooms each new term who appear to have no trouble at all in verbal fluency. These are the loquacious and garrulous, from age 2-to-20. The chinwags who seem to have no apparent weakness in verbally expressing their thoughts. They too, vary in their effectiveness, but we never seem quite as concerned with these verbose children even though they may suffer drastically when given the opportunity to express themselves in a formal manner which might require some logical operations of the mind to be spoken in a precise manner.

The major portion of most teachers' worry and classroom practice objectives are aimed at the child who is always at a loss for words.

Human beings commonly empathize with but seldom understand the taciturn person because he or she is not using the most highly distinguishing attribute of man: the gift of speech. The silent person appears less able, less proficient and less intellectually competent than others willing to talk. Thus, the reticent child is so labeled and condemned when speaking only with guarded utterances or choosing not to speak at all, remains mute.

Fortunately, there are very few children inhabiting our classes that fit into either of these extreme poles along a continuum of oral speaking habits. Most children are highly competent at expressing themselves within familiar speech patterns. They possess an adequate speaking vocabulary and have attained the appropriate thinking abilities commensurate with their developmental stage.

The need to be aware of these vast differences in the oral language proficiency of each child is highly important. This is the first step in guiding and preparing activities to foster an effective oral ability in each child. It does not take long before an astute teacher can detect the constant prattlers from the ordinary speakers and those from the laconic children. From alert observations, the teacher will stand in a better position to set up objectives and plans based on an individual basis, improving verbal power and helping children to know when different occasions call for various speaking patterns. This does not mean that there will be only soliloquys and monologues prepared for each child. It does mean however, that the teacher is able to accurately assess where each child stands in his speaking and thinking abilities. The teacher must

also set up tentative goals of expectations for the student to attain by the year's end. Goals in oral language skills that can be achieved realistically for each child.

Our schools are composed of divergent speakers. Because children do not all share the same dialect or common background in language learning, they speak and think in different patterns. That is as it should be. They perceive the world in different perspectives and this perception is reflected in the ways in which they attach symbols to represent the real environment. Each person's view of the world is predetermined by his cultural heritage, but still there is room for the individual to perceive on a very individualistic and personal point of reference. The "affective" teacher provides for this.

The individual language (idiolect) of the child must be recognized by teachers to be the most effective and pervasive influence on a child's thinking and learning potential. Whether a child experiences a sensuous, dynamic, and stimulating world or a drab, meager, and stilted world will depend on his interaction with the environment. The teacher's responsibility is to create a classroom atmosphere that entices and encourages a child to expand his world through language and a variety of language encounters.

Language can be stunted in any environment when there is no room allowed for creative, individual expression. Parents and teachers should encourage divergent speaking because conformity stifles creativity, and creative thinking must be expressed by creative language.

Two important insights that Loban obtained during his important longitudinal study regarding low-level language users were that language that is limited and inflexible and that does not serve the expanding needs of the child, particularly in school tasks and language that is considered nonstandard or socially unacceptable for educated members of society to use are features that all language arts teachers must address. (1976).

Teachers, administrators, and all educators must not confuse language that is inadequate with language that is different. To do so, would cause many school programs to become self defeating and many children would become totally inhibited from improving their language power. Failure to respect the child's language can only insure the child's failure in school and life tasks.

The child who enters kindergarten brings a backlog of five or six years of extensive language and experience which is embedded heavily in a socio-economic background. Language is an unconscious effort that is deeply internalized within the child. To have somebody reject a child's language is a reflection of disdain for a system of communication, feelings, and self-esteem. The child, regardless of cultural background is a grammatical expert in that original sentences can be created that are grammatically correct within a personal dialect. A five-year-old vocabulary is large enough to adequately express beginning conceptualizations of familiar surroundings based on common cultural experiences. It is the child's natural and knowing way of communicating with humanity.

In our society there are some who claim that the divergent speakers are

not capable of being expressive, abstract, powerful, proper and correct. That the dialect spoken by Blacks or Chicanos or East Europeans or Italians or Chinese is not superior to the so-named "Standard" English. Kohl makes the argument that this is one additional means by which the white middle-class continues to oppress minority groups. (1973). However, there must be some degree of commonality (standardization, if you will) in order to have a satisfactory degree and intensity of communication to occur between those from diverse cultures. The language arts teacher can work for this language commonality.

Linguistic research studies strongly support the notion that each dialect is basically systematic and that speakers of a dialect use its system with consistency. All languages are equally adequate for the needs of the members of a particular culture. (Shuy, 1973). When a child comes into contact with other subcultures and the general culture, he may feel a need to make certain changes in his language. This new need will generally stimulate a conscious need for expansion of the child's language. The teacher will be a most important figure in establishing a classroom environment in which each child is made to feel proud and comfortable of his idiolect. Irreparable damage results when the idiolect is ridiculed as being incorrect and substandard. The child then becomes defensive of his feelings, family, culture, communication system, and self. Classroom activities should be devised to help children understand there are certain social occasions and situations in which a different manner of speaking is desired. The child is not asked to relinquish native speech habits, but simply to expand it to meet new needs.

As much of the recent literature indicates, language and thinking are so interrelated that the two must be considered together because language is the main vehicle for the teaching of thinking and reasoning. To promote critical thinking processes teachers must be aware of the verbal and nonverbal stages of thinking. Evidence indicates that there is thinking without language, but only past the stage of egocentrism is there little language spoken without thinking. (Piaget, 1969).

Piaget and Vygotsky hypothesized several stages of developments in thinking that correspond with each other, but each varies somewhat in their explanation of motivation for intellectual development. Vygotsky maintains that the environment challenges and prompts initiation of the cognitive processes in a natural manner. If the child does not respond to these tasks of self-discovery, then it remains the responsibility of adults to make the tasks more evident. Piaget sees the child as structuring the environment with meaning through processes of assimilation and accommodation according to his own needs. A purely sensorimotor type of thought symbolizing precedes and is separate from the translation of those thoughts into words. The cognitive structures are pure thought connections involving language, but not as much emphasis is placed on the dialogue between children and teachers as does Vygotsky. (Duckworth, 1973).

The importance of child and adult interaction where the language of the child and the language of parents and teachers are exchanged in dialogue cannot be overemphasized. Even during the discovery stage, the child can be guided with carefully chosen questions and mutual observations

that can aid the child to better grasp and understand the phenomena in hearing the symbolic signs of language. During each stage of cognitive development, the language used by parents and teachers must be appropriate to the child's language to facilitate comprehension.

If there is a close relationship between language and cognitive development, so too, is there a relationship between emotional and social development. Teachers must stimulate children's thinking by not speaking in a condescending manner or by oversimplifying ideas. Children will be highly insulted by the compromising attitude of an adult which will have deleterious effects on any learning environment. Adult language and literary language, rich in vocabulary and varied in structural composition can serve as valuable models for a child's developing language.

Teachers can foster thinking power and growth by listening to what and how the child speaks. There are a multitude of verbal and nonverbal cues presented by the child at all times regarding personal thoughts which give invaluable aids and clues as to which developmental stage one is positioned. The alert and sensitive teacher will be prepared to assist in expanding the child's view from one of egocentricity to one of objectivity. The teacher must aid the child's hurdle from one stage of thinking to the next by offering new situations, complexes, problems, and materials. By raising appropriate questions and entering into a beneficial dialogue with the students and allowing children to talk with each other the teacher most likely will accomplish this feat.

The cultivation of a stimulating environment and appropriate language should be "matched" to the thinking stages as noted by Piaget and Vygotsky:

- 1) Perception of environmental raw data.
- 2) Cognition of perceptions.
- 3) Presentation of ideas. (Vygotsky, 1962).

These three classifications of transforming symbols of experience into meaningful interpretations can be quite helpful to teachers in understanding the processes of learning situations and the influence that language exerts upon such learning. There is an overlapping of these phases and a crucial interaction of the cognitive-affective domains of the child as he meets new objects and events.

During the perceiving stage, the teacher will have many opportunities to involve language activities, although much of the perceiving may be accomplished through nonverbal tactics--visual, auditory, or sensory encounters. The teacher should be aware of the value of conversation and discussion and how such can aid a child to perceive the world in an accurate manner. The types of questioning will require a child to look at a particular object that the teacher may deem as necessary for a convergent approach. Contrarywise, the teacher may allow for divergent expressions and responses to obtain a widening of perceptions. Unless the opportunity is provided for a session of affective responses, the teacher may never know that some children have an emotional reaction of fear and anxiety about particular things and happenings that blocks accurate perceiving. The past experience of the child, socio-economic background, and emotional disposition may interfere with being able to perceive. The need for establishing concrete life-situations in the classroom will provide novel situations that the child can confront and explore. (Smith, et al, 1970).

Teachers may consider some of the novel games of logic and reasoning being found on the market or perhaps make their own games of simulated challenges. Conceptualizing is the major act of transforming experience to symbol. The natural curiosity of an individual allows for an intense interaction of language, feeling, and cognitive energy to respond to a new perception. Language is indeed important to the conceptualizing of words and images perceived. Language captures a thought and embellishes it with a universal meaning that can be recalled from memory and used later to interact with future thoughts (Cohen, 1973).

Bruner describes thinking as a mediating process between stimulus input and an individual's response.(1968). Once the individual is freed from the stimulus he considers the situation in a critical and logical manner. Thus, language can be seen as an instrument of thinking and not solely as a means of communication.

There is a great need for language interaction between adults and children during the conceptualizing stage. Adult language embodies logical and factual information, but also content of an affective and judgmental nature that will have a tremendous influence on the concepts that a child formulates. The child soon learns by talking to adults that the grammatical mode differs according to a particular type of conceptualizing. Teachers must explore with children the different grammatical modes and when each is appropriate. The expository mode would be most appropriate when developing scientific concepts, when imagistic and prejudicial language must be withheld. However, in discussing aesthetic events, objects, and feelings, the refinement of a metaphorical mode of expression would

be more meaningful. Unfortunately, the literary mode is seldom used in a highly technological society unless the teacher makes a concentrated effort at exploring the literary mode of thinking and language with children.

As soon as a concept has been formed from a perception the individual will want to present this concept to others. This is the human manner for testing the strength of our conceptions. We need to know how our concepts are responded to by others.

There are various means of presenting our concepts to others which are dependent on the part of the structure used to convey the meanings. Conceptions that are expressed come alive when presented not only by opportunities of language discourse, but through various forms of art as well, such as musics, graphics, dancing and movement.

The reciprocal effect of presenting is important to children. They need opportunities to present concepts and need to experience the receiving of concepts presented by others. Literacy of the various forms of presenting should necessitate the child's learning how to present ideas in art forms and to translate the symbolic representation of others' art forms, whether they be of language or nonlingual presentation.

The experience of developing concepts is incomplete without activities to present one's ideas. Teachers must allow for class time and encourage a variety of individual and group presentations.

Presenting ideas is a capping phase of knowing, but it is also an initiation of new perceptions to be considered. We can think of the tremendous effects of adult artists, such as authors and illustrators of

children's literature, musical recordings, painters and sculptors, and various forms of drama, whether seen in person or through the film media as offering something new to challenge our intellect and emotions that will prompt us to enact upon them.

The purpose of this paper has been to illustrate that language is fundamental to the correlation of teaching and the development of thinking in children that results in knowing. I am proposing that we as concerned teachers and educators do have an obligation to provide a rich and meaningful environment for the expansion and development of a prolific storehouse of speech faculty in communicating with one's fellow-man for a variety of purposes and situations and as a tool necessary for the gaining of knowledge and expressing thoughts and feelings.

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